

Committee Overview

Established on June 26, 1945 by the UN Charter, the United Nations General Assembly is the main policymaking and deliberating body of the United Nations. Comprised of all 193 members of the United Nations, it covers a broad range of global issues and plays a major role in creating and enforcing international law. In the interest of maintaining national sovereignty, the General Assembly cannot pass mandates or resolutions that force a country into a specific course of action., nor can it use any force. Rather, it advises and assists nations with current international issues and concerns.

The General Assembly is divided into six committees to allow for specific discussion. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) is the fourth committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations. SPECPOL works with the UNSC and the rest of the General Assembly to propose solutions to current global issues. It encompasses a variety of topics including, but not limited to, decolonization, peacekeeping, human rights, outer space, and refugees. Many countries consider SPECPOL to be the most versatile of all the committees, as it mainly addresses issues not dealt with by the first committee, DISEC. The committee meets once a year for one month, and all member nations are invited to attend. SPECPOL also works with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the rest of the General Assembly to propose solutions to current global issues.

Recently, the committee took actions in June 2014 urging countries around the world to implement of peacekeeping protocols in Africa. It also discussed possible peaceful uses of outer space, the effects of atomic radiation, and Palestinian refugees, among others.

Domestic Violence

Overview

Domestic violence is commonly defined as violent or aggressive behavior within the home, usually from a spouse or partner. Although domestic violence can occur against men or women, it is more prevalent against women, with women being around 5 times more likely than

men to suffer violence from an intimate partner in the United States. The UN defines domestic violence as " violence perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members, and manifested through physical abuse, ... sexual abuse, ... psychological abuse, ... and Economic abuse."

Current studies indicate that around one in three women will become a victim of domestic violence in their lifetime, and many experts even suggest that women are inclined to under-report their victimization in fear of shame and social stigma attached with it. Recent studies have shown that domestic violence against women between 15-49 is decreasing worldwide, but is still at an average rate of around 30%. Reasons for this decrease are commonly attributed to the efforts already made by the UN and its agencies.

Organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) record statistics and conduct studies about domestic violence. The WHO conducts studies through unbiased surveys around the world and UNPFA volunteers assist struggling countries as well as collect data about specific issues concerning population and human rights. In 2011, volunteers in the Hunan province of China conducted a workshop teaching women about gender equality and collected research about qualities generally ascribed as being masculine. This study, led by Partners of Prevention, was part of a wider research project on gender-based violence in the Asia-Pacific region. The results of this study generated a new analysis on stereotypes and violence in the region and is expected to improve measures to prevent and respond to violence against women.

History

Records and policies regarding domestic abuse extend as far back as the 18th century. Then, English Common Law allowed for a man to physically assault his dependents in the name of discipline. Although this law expressly included only servants and children, many interpretations by courts included women as well. Another commonly cited example of historical domestic violence against women is described in Sir William Blackstone's Commentaries on the

Laws of England, published in 1766. In it, Blackstone reasoned that, because a man was legally responsible for his wife's behavior, he should be permitted, within reasonable bounds, to physically restrain her if necessary. However, as "reasonable bounds" is a fairly subjective limit, these views eventually developed into a culture that abated and condoned domestic violence. In fact, they became so ingrained into these societies that the first movements championing women's rights in the late 19th century did not challenge men's prerogatives to discipline their wives. Rather, they expressed concern over excessive wife-battering and successfully lobbied many jurisdictions to pass laws against such violence. This led to more police interventions, but arrests were still rarely made.

After these movements, the next large campaign was made in the late 20th century, as part of the feminist movement. During this time period, the modern definition of domestic violence first came into use, and consequent studies showed that men could also be victims of domestic abuse surfaced. This type of abuse is typically more psychological, but can be just as damaging. Modern studies of domestic violence against men, such as Mirrless Black's survey entitled Domestic Violence: Findings From a New British Crime Survey Self-Completion Questionnaire, all cite failure to report as why many people overlook this problem. Other reasons include less physically scarring and less resources for aid available. This is due to the pervasive stereotype that men are physically stronger than women and should be able to stop it themselves.

Historically, the General Assembly has passed several resolutions acknowledging the presence and growing concern over domestic violence. In December 1993, during the 85th plenary meeting of the General Assembly, one such resolution titled the "Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women" recognized the rights of women in international documents and the unequal power relation between genders. It also made statements expressing that violence against women is a pressing issue and supported organizations that champion

women's rights. Article 4 of this resolution details specific actions states should take to minimize domestic violence, including harsher punishments, more rigid enforcement, and widespread support of organizations that raise awareness of the situation. It also includes resources for all of these aforementioned actions in the national budget of all countries. Although this plan may have contributed to a decrease in domestic violence for the next few years, trends will begin to flatline at the turn of the 21st century.

Current Status

Although domestic violence has been brought to the public's attention in most Western nations, countries located in Asia and the Middle East have yet to pass any legislation, even though Asian women are proportionately more likely to experience domestic violence, at 41-61%, as opposed to the worldwide average of around 30%. Many areas in Southeast Asia still uphold customs including child or arranged marriage and a stronger preference of men over women in society. Many Muslim countries also have similar customs, such as strict modesty guidelines for women and a more accepted view of men as authority figures. This creates a large age gap between partners and further belittling of women. It is also much more difficult to report domestic violence in these areas, as the laws defining domestic violence are less clear than those of Western nations. Even when defined, these laws are not well enforced. Additionally, women in developing countries are more at risk because the government cannot afford to allot funds to combat domestic violence. Although many organizations, such as the UN's UNiTE To End Violence Against Women Campaign, have been created to raise awareness, little progress can be made without the government's aid and intervention.

As previously mentioned, statistics showing that around 30% of women worldwide, or roughly one in three, will be victims of domestic abuse have remained fairly constant for the last decade. In 2009, more serious efforts were made to eliminate domestic violence against women. Resolution 64/137, appropriately titled the "Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of

violence against women” was adopted on December 18, 2009. It implores non-governmental agencies to help disadvantaged women suffering from domestic violence in place of their government. Furthermore, it calls for more research to be conducted on the matter and restates many ideas expressed in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Analysis

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed his support for the cause by stating that “Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women’s lives, on their families and on society as a whole. Most societies, western and eastern alike, prohibit such violence – yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned.” Many of the world’s leaders are in agreement concerning the prevalence and urgency of domestic violence.

Most experts, such as William Ickes, author of Compatible and Incompatible Relationships, argues that more funds to be put local shelters for women who have escaped violence and other relief programs. Others call for more programs like the UN’s UNite to end violence campaign. They stress that the first priority should be to provide relief and support to the many victims of domestic abuse. Unfortunately, this does not allow for a decrease in domestic violence overall.

Professor of Psychology Neil Jacobson offers some less prevalent ideas. He believes that focus should be put on helping women leave abusive relationships. However, each individual case of domestic violence is complicated and leaving is not always a viable option, especially when the women have children or rely on their husbands for economic support.

Many, less popular opinions regarding domestic violence also exist. For example, the aforementioned Professor Jacobson, and many other countries, advocate for the rehabilitation of men that commit these crimes.. Some countries, such as the Republic of Iran, have not ratified

documents that acknowledge domestic violence and do not acknowledge domestic violence in their laws.

Other organizations such as Break the Cycle advocate educating youth about early signs of domestic or dating abuse. Their aim is to help young adults recognize when a relationship has turned poisonous and thereby prevent the problem before it begins. Helen Rubenstein, Deputy Director of Women's Human Rights Program, and Professor Evan Stark have a similar solution. They advocate that habits like stalking and extreme monitoring or controlling of the victims actions should be taken more seriously as they commonly lead to more serious forms of domestic violence.

The topic of domestic violence has been championed and brought to light by numerous individuals over the course of the last century. In general, because of large differences between each individual case, it is difficult to come up with a solution that can help all women. Many solutions also require a significant amount of funds to succeed. However, the solution to domestic violence is a vital part of ensuring basic human rights for everyone across the world.

Questions to Consider:

- Do you believe that previous efforts by the UN to resolve the issue have succeeded? Why or why not? If yes, why? If no, how do you think that they could be revised to resolve the issue?
- What should be done about customs that abate and even encourage violence against women in the household? Should they be abolished or changed? If yes, how do you plan to do this?
- How do charities and nonprofit organizations like Break the Chain help the issue?
- What kinds of legal action, if any, has your country taken in response to the growing issue of domestic violence?

- Why do you think that domestic violence is still so prevalent around the world, especially after the UN has taken so many measures to fight against it?
- Why do you think that there is so little focus on domestic violence in some countries even though 30% of women around the world are victims? What steps could be taken to solve this issue?
- What is the best way to prevent men (and sometimes women) from abusing their partners? Should there be stricter punishments? If so, what type?
- Do you think that awareness of the issue (or lack of it) is a problem? If yes, what steps could be taken to resolve this?
- What, in your country's opinion, is the best way to eliminate domestic violence? Should there be a greater focus on creating new laws, enforcement, relief to victims, or something else?

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- <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm> - The General Assembly's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which served as the "spark" for women's rights.
- <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/digest6e.pdf> - UNICEF's report on the causes and long-term repercussions of domestic violence.
- <http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/agdbasev7wr/bocsar/documents/pdf/bb61.pdf> - Trends in domestic violence over the past 10 years and possible causes.

- http://www.stopvaw.org/domestic_violence_un_resolutions - Past UN resolutions concerning domestic violence.
- <http://www.un.org/rights/dpi1772e.htm> - UN official definitions and informations on various types of domestic violence and actions taken by the UN to combat them.
- <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/> - Official UN statistics and data on domestic violence worldwide (October 2013).
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Syrian Refugees

Introduction

Situated along the Mediterranean Sea between Turkey and Lebanon, the nation of Syria began as a province of the Ottoman Empire. After World War I, France obtained a mandate for

the then province and granted Syria its independence in 1946. For a brief period of time, Syria joined with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic, but the two entities parted in 1961, resulting in the Arab Republic of Egypt and Syrian Arab Republic. In 1970, the leader of the minority socialist Ba'ath Party, Hafez al-Assad, assumed power through a bloodless coup. The rise of al-Assad brought political stability to Syria as well as the beginning attempts to modernize the Syrian economy and society. Following his death, al-Assad's son, Bashar al-Assad, took his father's place as president in 2000. Both al-Assad and his father are members of the Ba'ath Party and the Alawi sect of Islam. In a population of over 18 million, 74% of Syrians are Sunni Muslims, while the Alawites belong to a sect of the minority Shia Islam. In 2011, a series of uprisings known collectively as the Arab Spring spread across the Middle East and North Africa. In Syria, dissenting opinions against the reigning regime rose together in an uprising that led to an ongoing civil war, resulting in the displacement of millions of Syrians.

History

_____ In addition to the structure and stability Hafez al-Assad brought to Syria, he is also remembered notoriously for violently silencing the opposition to his rule. Although Syria is technically regarded as a republic, Bashar al-Assad ran unopposed for the presidency in 2000, and up until the Syrian Uprising, al-Assad imitated his father in successfully suppressing opposition to his authoritarian regime. Since 1963, Syria has operated under Emergency Laws, allowing the government to suspend constitutional legislation and greatly restrict the freedom of citizens. The Emergency Laws allowed for the ban of certain political parties, restriction of personal freedoms such as speech and assembly, and arrests without charge. In March of 2011, a group of teenagers graffitied the words, "The people want the fall of the regime" on a wall in Deraa, a Syrian city on the Jordanian border. As a result, security forces detained the boys, releasing them after a week of apparent mistreatment and torture. In response, protests against the regime emerged, demanding for the repeal of the Emergency Laws and the resignation of al-Assad. Although al-Assad remained president, authorities repealed the Emergency Laws.

Officials met protests in Damascus and various other cities with a violent response, opening fire on demonstrators. The use of military force in order to silence dissent against Bashar led to more demonstrations and protests across the nation calling for al-Assad's resignation. Militants continued to use force on protesters, and protesters themselves eventually took up arms. Five months after protests first began, rebels began to fight government militants in a full blown civil war. Although the government faced strong resistance from insurgents, hundreds of different rebel groups divided the opposition.

For the past three years, such fighting has resulted in a substantial amount of damage, demolishing many areas of cities and claiming more than an estimated 150,000 lives. Along with the homes and lives of Syrians, the war resulted in the departure of millions of citizens. In 2011, only a few Syrians left their homes in order to escape the conflict. However, a small trickle of refugees into neighboring nations has quickly turned into a mass exodus. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), almost 3 million refugees fled abroad to Syria's neighbors. Along with its external refugees, Syria has an estimated 6.4 million internally displaced persons (IDP) within its borders, half of which are children. Therefore, the total number of displaced Syrians is 9.4 million, resulting in the world's largest humanitarian disaster. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 10.8 million people within Syria need humanitarian aid, 4.6 million of which reside in isolated areas.

Additionally, the overwhelming flow of refugees out of Syria has created major problems for its bordering nations. Egypt houses almost 140,000 refugees, Iraq 218,000, Jordan 611,000, and Turkey 822,000. Lebanon has received the most refugees of all. 1.16 million Syrians have entered in the past three years and now contribute to a quarter of Lebanon's total population. However, unlike Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey, Lebanon did not set up refugee camps until 2013. Refugees lived in rented housing, nomadic camps, or in the homes of Lebanese families. In Jordan, 80,000 of the refugees live in the Za'atari refugee camp, now the fourth largest Jordanian

city and second biggest refugee camp in the world. These nations struggled to accommodate the vast influx of refugees and continue to grapple with the high costs of maintaining camps. Turkey spent \$1.5 million on accommodating refugees as of May 2013, and has requested additional international aid which has come partially from the United Nations.

Life outside of Syria is not easy for refugees or host nations. The arrival of refugees means limited resources for both refugees and nationals. In some areas such as Jordan, where only 20% of refugees reside in camps, the price of rent and other items on the market have skyrocketed. Because refugees have a right to work even when displaced, the job competition increases. Food supplies consequently decrease. Without proper nutrition and diet, refugees find themselves more susceptible to malnutrition and disease. Even Syria, regarded as the breadbasket of the region, does not have enough food to sustain citizens.

Current Status

_____ Regarding the Syrian conflict itself, the United Nations has passed several resolutions calling for an end to violence. In 2012, the UN Security Council (UNSC) implemented a Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) in hopes of bringing about an end to the war. Since November 2011, the Arab League has suspended Syria's membership due to disproportionate violence from the conflict. Internationally, several bodies, including the United States, European Union, and Turkey have imposed sanctions on Syria in hopes of pressuring the regime to end the war.

In a 1951 Convention, the United Nations defined the universal rights of refugees. Refugees cannot find protection under certain states, either because of nations' unwillingness or inability to protect them. In such a case, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol outline the rights of people who meet refugee criteria, upheld by the United Nations and international community. Such rights, including the right to work, housing, and freedom of religion ensure that, "refugees deserve, as a minimum, the same standards of treatment enjoyed by other foreign nationals in a given country."

While the UNSC focuses on passing resolutions in an effort to end the civil war in Syria, the General Assembly has passed several resolutions condemning the actions of Syria. Most notably, the General Assembly condemned the human rights violations of the Syrian government and called for the UNSC to take measures to end such violations in 2013. As of 2014, the UN has also requested 2.28 billion USD in order to provide humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees. However, only 30.3% of this request has been funded.

Current Analysis

_____ Although the United Nations has dedicated many resources towards the aid of Syrian refugees, certain factors exist that prevent refugees from receiving the help they desperately need. The UN estimate of refugees tend to be on the lower end, as thousands of people fleeing Syria do not register themselves as refugees out of a medley of fear, ignorance, and paranoia. Suspicious refugees avoid the complicated registration process as they believe the bureaucratic Syrian government could potentially run it. Subsequently, the United Nations is unable to deliver supplies to unregistered refugees.

The Za'atari camp costs \$500,000 a day to run, with only poor living conditions. However, the manager of the Za'atari camp, Kilian Kleinschmidt, notes that because the Syrian people in the camp no longer trust authority due to recent experiences, the UN workers in the camp changed tactics. Instead of distributing handouts and emphasising authority, workers distribute vouchers as a currency within the camps. This resulted in an economy within the camp that resolved another problem commonly associated with refugees - boredom. This system led to refugees, many traders and merchants now with a purpose, setting up their own supermarkets and businesses. Within the Za'atari camp a community is forming; refugees looking after one another, even looking after each other's children through the expansion of the school system for refugee children.

Conclusion

In the past three years, the Syrian people experienced a whirlwind of hardships. They witnessed and experienced torture, saw violence committed against their neighbors, and some uprooted their lives in order to escape the raging war in their homeland. The conflict has led to a mass exodus of an almost unparalleled degree, while still leaving millions of citizens displaced within Syria's borders. It is imperative to quickly find a solution to best aid these citizens in response to the physical, mental, emotional, and psychological damage inflicted by the conflict. Please submit a position paper on behalf of your delegation on the topic, taking into consideration several questions below. The issue at hand is complex and must be analyzed from several aspects in order to ensure the best possible solution for all parties involved.

Questions to Consider

- What are the relations between your country and Syria? Does your country support the government, the rebels, or is it indifferent?
- How is your country affected by the influx of Syrian refugees? Even if refugees do not directly travel to your nation, how do they indirectly affect you?
- How do sanctions on Syria affect your nation's economy?
- What measures has your country taken in response to the Syrian conflict?
- What should be done to reach Syrians who have fled their country but are not registered refugees?
- From where should the other approximate 70% of funding for refugee camps requested by the UN come?
- How can the United Nations effectively provide aid to IDP in hard to reach areas?
- Can the growing system of refugees working to create an economy and society within the Za'atari camp be successfully applied on a large scale? If so, how?
- What programs are in place to help refugees get back on their feet after the conflict is over and they choose to return home?

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- <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703856> - A detailed profile of Syria including a timeline of events, description of leaders, and statistics by the BBC.
- <http://www.un.org/News/> - Recent news from the UN News Centre, including articles and publications.
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